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ABSTRACT

This special issue consists of the following seven articles on communicative competence: (1) "Psycholinguistics and Language Teaching," by Elisabeth Ingram; (2) "Current Trends in Language Teaching at the C.R.A.P.E.L.," by Philip Riley; (3) "Who Needs a Teacher? - An Alternative to the 'Conversation Class'," by Ken Heaney; (4) "Some Current Problems in Language Testing," by Viljo Kohonen; (5) "Group Conversation as a Means of Teaching and Testing Spoken Language," by David Falland; (6) "Foreign Language Conversation Testing at Tampere Language Institute," by Walter Bacon and Sirkka-Liisa Ojanen; (7) "Spoken English Grading Test," by Philip Binham. (CPM)

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Kielikeskusuutisia

LANGUAGE CENTRE NEWS N:o 4/1976

SPECIAL ISSUE ON TEACHING AND TESTING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Edited by
Viljo Kohonen
Liisa Nummenmaa

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PREFACE

Recently there has been a shift of emphasis in foreign-language teaching from what is called linguistic competence to communicative competence. The former term refers to the ability to understand and correctly produce the discrete components of the language, whereas the latter emphasizes the ability to function in real-life communicative situations.

The new emphasis on communicative competence will change and modify traditional teaching methods and techniques of evaluating student learning. For example, teacher-centered methods will probably be replaced, to some extent at least, by more student-centered ones, such as group-work and individualized instruction. The very concept of error may have to be reformulated in terms of efficiency in communication.

Such changes will compel present and future teachers to face a set of new challenges. Many teachers may even feel that their training has been inadequate. We are now fortunate in having access to texts such as S. Pit Corder, Introducing Applied Linguistics (Penguin 1973; also available in Finnish: Miten kielitiedettä sovelletaan, 1976) and The Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics (four volumes, edited by J.P.B. Allen and S.Pit Corder, Oxford University Press 1973-76), which offer useful background reading to those wishing to update their teaching methods. The editors hope that the present volume, which is the first special issue of Kielikeskus-uutisia - Language Centre News, will similarly help and support teachers who want to develop their methods towards the teaching and testing of communicative competence.

Jyväskylä, September, 1976

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PSYCHOLINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING[1]

1. There are two views on what psycholinguistics is about.

1.1. One view is neatly summarized in the title of a recent book: Psycholinguistics: Chomsky and Psychology (Greene 1973). According to this view, Chomsky's linguistic and metalinguistic theories define the field. He sees linguistics as a branch of psychology, with the ultimate aim of explaining the workings of the human mind. Therefore, a valid linguistic theory must not only be capable of accounting for purely language phenomena, it must also be capable of accounting for how native speakers learn and use their language. In this way the linguistic model becomes the psycholinguistic model; i.e. the linguists' description of language is also in some ill-defined way supposed to be a description of what goes on inside people's heads when they produce and understand sentences.

One of the chief features of the generative-transformational model is that the central component, syntax, has to be described at two levels; at the level of deep structure and at the level of surface structure. For each sentence, the deep structure contains the essential meaning relations. In the jargon, the deep structure "assigns labelled bracketed descriptions". But the output of the deep structure does not look like the sentences of ordinary language, and so one needs the transformational rules of the surface component to convert the deep structure version of sentences into their grammatically correct surface form.

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the first national language laboratory conference at university level in Norway, Klækken, Norway, 21-24 April 1976, organised by Sentret for Språkpedagogikk, Universitetet i Oslo.

Those psycholinguists who work within the transformational-generative framework have been mainly concerned to show that actual sentences in a given language are more or less complicated for people to process according to how many rules are needed to convert from the deep structure form of the sentence to the surface form. This is sometimes referred to as the derivational complexity theory, or the D.C.T. Very briefly, the outcome of a great many experiments is this: When subjects have to recognize or memorise sentences, the D.C.T. theory is to some extent upheld; for instance passive sentences are more difficult to process than active sentences. (To interpret such findings, one could also appeal to the greater frequency of active sentences, to the fact that active sentences are shorter, etc.) But what is more important, when the subjects have to take account of the meaning of sentences, of what the sentences say about somebody or something, then the syntactic effect virtually disappears. (For a slightly more detailed discussion, and references, see Ingram 1971.)

And this is the limitation of the Chomskyan model: it concerns itself with language as a formal system, it does not deal with the relationship between language and the rest of the world, with what people use language for. There is no way of incorporating into the model the purposes that people have when they utter, or the knowledge and experience and mutual expectations that people have of each other when they converse or write or read.

In pedagogical circles, the influence that this psycholinguistic model has had is paradoxically both pervasive and ineffective. In a pervasive and general sense it has been very useful to be reminded of the important distinction between deep and surface structure. (It has to be remembered though, that this distinction is at least implicit in all schools of linguistics, except the structuralist.) There has been a lot of verbal attention paid to the concepts of competence and performance (the particular Chomskyan formulation of knowing and doing), but as far as I can see, the actual impact of these concepts on language teaching and learning practices have been negligible. The specific psycholinguistic hypotheses are not as well known as the general notions, and they have had very little effect, partly because they are not known

and partly because they have not been thought to be relevant.[1]

1.2. The other view of what psycholinguistics is about is much wider. According to this view psycholinguistics comprises anything that has to do with language production, language comprehension and language acquisition, and with the mental processes that underlie these activities. There is obviously much here that could just as easily be called sociolinguistics, but typically, psycholinguists adhering to the wider view would not be unduly worried about labels of one sort or another. They would feel reasonably free to investigate any aspect of how people use and acquire language, and they would accept that, at least for the time being, different theoretical models might be appropriate for different kinds of investigations.

2. In this section I shall try to present an example of psycholinguistic analysis, in the wider sense. I shall draw on a British linguistic model for a description of spoken language, and from psychology, on some of the work that has been done on perceptual processes. Then I shall attempt to relate this psycholinguistic conjunction to one aspect of language teaching.

2.1. Linguistics. Instead of the usual two-way distinction between the written and the spoken language, Abercrombie (1965) makes a three-way distinction:

- prose written to be read
- prose written to be read aloud (i.e. plays, news bulletins, formal lectures, language teaching exercises and dialogues)
- conversation (actual speech, that is, what people say to each other and how they say it without recourse to pen and paper).

Only conversation is spoken language, in the proper sense. And it differs, obviously, from written language - prose written to be read - in a number of ways, but what is equally important:

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1) There is however at least one textbook of English as a foreign language built on the TG model, Rutherford 1968. For a vigorous attack on the TG model in the context of foreign language learning see Lamendella 1969.

it also differs significantly from prose written to be read aloud. Many British linguists hold that the basic descriptive units for the written language - sentence, clause, phrase, word, morpheme - are inappropriate for spoken language. Halliday (1971 and elsewhere) proposes the following units for the description of spoken language:

- the tonegroup; defined in terms of a major intonation contour and a major stress or tonic. A tonegroup consists of one or more feet
- the foot; a unit containing one stressed syllable, with optionally other syllables in addition
- the syllable; the definition of which is dicey, an entity universally recognized, but with boundaries very difficult to define. A syllable consists of one or more phonemes
- the phoneme; the lowest unit on the phonological scale.

The point about these units is that they are defined in terms of phonological characteristics, not in terms of syntactical or lexical features. Tonegroup boundaries may coincide with sentence or clause boundaries but quite often they do not. And in natural speech, syllable boundaries may not coincide with word boundaries. For instance, in French there is a phonological rule that assigns an intervocalic consonant to the second syllable, and this holds good also across word boundaries: elle imite has the same syllable structure as elle limite: /ɛ li mit/.

Prose read aloud tends to respect the syntactic and lexical divisions, and that is one of the main differences between it and genuine spoken language. There are others, mentioned by Abercrombie and also by Brown (1974): spoken language has more variation in intonation and loudness and tempo; there are many more pauses and repetitions and false starts; sounds which are present in isolated forms can be reduced or absent in actual speech. Gill Brown instances a range of realisations of going to: the standard or citation form is /gouiŋtu/ but one is more likely to hear /gouiŋtʊ/, /gowiŋtə/, /gɜŋtə/ or even /gənə/.

2.2. Psychology: theory of perception. The perceptual channel is limited. The number of things we can take in from the outside world at any given time, and process in a meaningful way are rather few.

Miller (1956) gave the famous formulation: The magical number seven, plus or minus one or two. We cannot usually perceive more than around six or seven or eight distinct sensory entities at one time, at one moment of attention. For instance, a string of 16 unrelated letters cannot be apprehended in one glance:

TGIIUOLSSCCYIHPN.

But if the information can be grouped into higher-order units, it is a different matter. By rearranging the 16 letters above we get

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and that can be taken in at a glance. The reason is of course that we are processing the information not in letter units but in word (or morpheme) units.

This is a limitation on capacity. There is also a time-limitation on the perceptual channel. It is difficult to retain a serially presented previously unknown telephone number of more than 7-8 digits for long enough to dial it, without writing it down. Coming nearer language, experiments have been made where people have to read lists of unrelated words, in order to find animal names, or food names, or whatever. In this way the participants had to pay attention to the meaning of the words. It has been shown repeatedly that under such conditions people cannot process more than about 3 words per second, with an upper limit of 5, if the words are very short (Neisser 1968).

Now, people produce utterances at a much greater rate than 5 one-syllable words or 3 two-syllable words per second, and yet what they say is structured and in accordance with their communicative intentions, and their listeners can understand them. Obviously, both in production and comprehension of spoken language we must be dealing with units larger than words and syllables, for much of the time. But there is always the possibility of reverting to the lower units. This is what we do when there are misunderstandings, or when something unexpected is being said: Did you say "They are leaving together" or "They are living together"?

This chunking of information units into larger, higher-order units, which again are grouped into even larger units, is one of the ways in which we overcome the limitations on the perceptual channel. There are two other important strategies. One has to do with selecting what part of the incoming signal to pay attention to,

the other has to do with anticipating what the speaker is likely to say next.

Not all parts of the phonetic phonological signal carry equal amount of information. In English at least, consonants carry more than the vowels do. And the significant features differ in part from language to language. Norwegians finish many utterances on a rising intonation even when they are not asking questions; Finns, I am told, often ask questions with a falling of level intonation. To discover a question in either language, one must obviously focus attention either on some subtler part of the intonation pattern, or find clues in the syntax. Vowel length is distinctive in many languages (English, Norwegian, Finnish), but not in all, for instance not in French. French learners of these languages have to learn to select length as a significant feature of the signal.

In situations where one is able to predict, at least to some extent, what comes next, perception improves considerably. Experiments have been conducted where people have to try to identify words which have been recorded on tape with varying degrees of noise added. When the words were grouped in topics, for instance names of foods or names of vehicles, and the subjects were told what the topic was, they could recognize many more words than with unordered lists. There was the same degree of noise, the same length of words, the difference was that in one case the subjects were able to form expectations, in the other case they were not.

In real-life communication situations we anticipate a good deal. This is most obvious when something goes wrong. Many people find it very difficult to proofread. One expects to find what is correct, and so one just does not see misspellings and other mistakes (also of course, one is used to processing the text in larger units than letters or even words). In conversation some people have a habit of jumping in and finishing the speakers' sentences for them. Annoying, but it could not be done without anticipation. And when the anticipation is wrong, for instance when someone in a conversation suddenly starts an entirely new topic, the listener quite often does not take in the information - does not hear - and has to ask for a repeat.

3. The pedagogical connection. One of the aims of language teaching in most school systems is that the learner should be able to talk to native speakers in their language, that he should acquire command of the language of conversation. In order to do this, they need not necessarily be able to produce authentic language, but they must be able to understand it.

The characteristics of authentic spoken language differ not only from written language - prose written to be read - but also from prose written to be read aloud.

The perceptual channel is limited. In order to process information reaching us from the outside in the time available, we must, for any given language, learn to select the information carrying parts of the signal, learn to recognize and to process the message in terms of higher-order rather than lower-order units, and we must develop appropriate strategies for anticipating what the speaker is going to say.

This takes practice. But the practice must obviously be on the right material. Listening to prose read aloud, which is what usually happens, sooner or later becomes counterproductive, because the learners get used to listening for features they will not find in authentic language, and because they will be led into false expectations about rhythm and tempo and degrees of variation. And they will get no experience in dealing with the syntax of spoken language.[1]

Some would say further that the practice should be conscious, that the best way to develop appropriate strategies of listening

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1) There remains the practical problem of how to lead up to understanding of authentic language. Recorded real life conversations (Crystal, 1976, BELC n.d.) are very difficult to understand, even when they are accompanied by varying degrees of idealized transcripts. One possible approach would be to provide two or three versions of the same recording; by judicious cutting and editing one could get a simplified cleaned-up version. Everything on the tape would be authentic, but most of the repetitions and false starts and irrelevancies and overlaps between speakers would be eliminated. This has in fact been done for Finnish learners of English (May and Wilson 1972). The learners could then progress to a tape with fewer cuts, before proceeding to the original version.

and anticipation is to be aware of what one is doing; and to verbalize about it, perhaps with a group of other learners. But that takes us into cognitive processes in general and is beyond this particular exercise in psycholinguistic analysis.

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CURRENT TRENDS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AT THE C.R.A.P.E.L.

The Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues (C.R.A.P.E.L.) was founded in 1962 by the late Professor Yves Chalon and a group of colleagues working within the Faculty of Letters of the University of Nancy.

Within the University and allied institutions (student population 25,000) the C.R.A.P.E.L. is responsible for the provision of English teaching to all non-specialists (i.e. students whose main subject is not English). In addition, the Centre provides evening classes and specialised courses to industry under the loi de formation continue. During the academic year 1975/6 approximately 5,000 students followed C.R.A.P.E.L. organised courses. Obviously this requires a very wide range of courses, and it would be quite impossible to give even a general description of them here. Instead, brief indications will be given of three principles which guide the C.R.A.P.E.L.'s approach to any language teaching/learning.[1] These principles are:

1. Communicative Competence,
2. The use of authentic materials,
3. The development of autonomy.

1. Communicative competence

For some years, research carried out both by the C.R.A.P.E.L. and by other centres of applied linguistics has shown the inadequacy of linguistic analyses which are limited to the internal functioning

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1) More information on the work being done at the C.R.A.P.E.L. is given in Appendix 1.

of the verbal code, to the exclusion of the circumstances (speakers, situation, etc.) in which the code is used. The micro-linguistic approach simply does not correspond to the needs of language learners who are not interested in becoming linguists, but in communicating in a foreign language. Instead, a new line of development, drawing its support from a number of sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic studies, has extended the field of research to include both the internal functioning (morpho-syntax, lexis, phonology) and the external functioning (relationships between text and situation, text and speaker, etc.) of the verbal code.

In other words, descriptions carried out according to this new approach are based not just on the utterance, but on the verbal exchange in its entirety. This sort of analysis aims at bringing to light both the rules of construction and the rules of use for utterances produced in verbal exchanges. It is no longer regarded as sufficient to describe an utterance such as "John has gone" as, say, a "positive declarative sentence consisting of a subject and a predicate" (with the terminology varying according to the type of description chosen). Instead, the new analysis must also define the function of the utterance in the verbal exchange in which it was produced, by relating it to the other factors relevant to that exchange, such as context, situation, speakers, non-verbal signals, etc. in order to determine whether it is a reply to a request for information, an excuse, a reproach and so on.

This analysis has very important implications for language-teaching; instead of seeing the language as nothing more than a verbal code, it is now regarded as a 'tool of communication'. Consequently, learning a language is not just a matter of acquiring a code whose rules permit us to construct utterances, but also involves acquiring communicative competence, the ability to construct utterances and to use them to carry out the communicative acts which our verbal exchanges consist of. "... there is less talk of 'grammar' and 'structure': the key words are 'communication' and 'discursive function'. It is no longer a matter of knowing how to built forms called 'sentences', but of knowing how to use them to good effect for the purpose of expressing certain functions."

The macro-linguistic analysis should make clear what are the realisations of various functions in the different dialects, registers and styles which have been established. For instance, the phrases

'You are annoying me' and 'You really get up my nose' (together with all their prosodic and paralinguistic characteristics) can be realisations of the same function operating at different levels and registers. (The pedagogical implications of these distinctions are discussed below.)

Although the concept of communicative competence is equally applicable to all language skills and media, for clarity the notes which follow on refer to an oral course for beginners.

In a course for beginners, this desire to use only authentic texts as far as is possible gives rise to quite a few problems (particularly at the level of the teaching of oral expression). Our solution is as follows:

(i) In the sections dealing with oral comprehension, all texts are authentic.

(ii) In the sections dealing with oral expression, a large proportion of the texts (which are in general rather short phrases) are either texts which have been culled from the corpus, but re-recorded, or are texts which have had to be constructed because of gaps in the corpus. Texts are re-recorded either to obtain a better acoustic quality, or to avoid using as a model (for repetition, for example,) utterances containing idiolectal features of performance. It would be worthless, probably even dangerous, to have learners reproducing all the hesitations, repetitions, errors, etc. which the speakers produced in the original text. This breach of our fundamental rule is less serious than it might seem: "expression" is never studied independently of "comprehension", and taken together the two sections include far more authentic texts than constructed texts, if only because of the greater length of the texts used for comprehension work.

Objectives

The global objective of our Beginners' Course in spoken English is the acquisition of a minimal adequate communicative competence in oral English which will allow our students to begin on 'non-systematic' studies, as defined in our overall strategy. This subsumes two specific objectives:

a) Acquisition of a minimum adequate competence in oral comprehension.

b) Acquisition of a minimum adequate competence in oral expression.

If we take these in turn for more detailed discussion, we can see that objective (a) aims at enabling the learner to understand communicative functions and their meanings (understanding, for example, that an utterance is an order and that in this particular case it is an order to go and move a badly parked car.) These communicative functions are encountered in a variety of verbal exchanges, such as everyday conversation, telephone calls, news broadcasts, television commercials and so on. The competence thus acquired is not limited to the comprehension of oral discourse alone: and the range of dialects, levels, registers and styles is as wide as is practicably possible - British and American accents; cultivated and un-cultivated levels; formal, informal and familiar registers, etc..

The minimum level aimed at is well above that which is aimed at in expression, which reflects both their relative importance and the fact that progress in comprehension always advances much more quickly than progress in expression.

Objective (b) aims at enabling the learner to express verbally as many as possible of the communicative functions which are come across in everyday speech and in the 'vital' verbal exchanges in the foreign country.

The competence thus acquired is limited to the production of spoken text in British English, at a cultivated level in both the formal and informal registers and in an unmarked style (i.e. one which is not peculiar to journalism, science or literature, etc.).

Progression

The most fundamental problem concerning the grammatical progression of the course concerned the relationship between the acquisition of the morpho-syntax and the acquisition of the communicative functions. There is no one-to-one relationship between the functions and the morpho-syntax: a given function can be realised by several different utterances, and one and the same utterance can realise a variety of different functions. For example, the 'interrogative form' can be used to realise a request for information, an order,

a threat. Take, for example, the utterance 'Will you be finished soon?' In the same way an order can be realised by an utterance which is interrogative or imperative or negative - for example:

"Give me a drink"

"How many times do I have to tell you that I want a drink?"

"A nice cool beer wouldn't do me any harm"

"Please, I'm thirsty".

Theoretically, then, there are four possibilities to choose from:

(i) To base the progression on the functions, fitting in the morphosyntax afterwards.

(ii) To base the progression on the morphosyntax, fitting in the functions afterwards.

(iii) To provide a common progression for both the functions and the morphosyntax.

(iv) To dissociate the functions and the morphosyntax, providing separate progressions for each.

The first three possibilities are excluded on pedagogical and/or linguistic grounds: (i) and (ii) would result in a disproportionate overloading of the first units of the course, because the introduction of even one function would necessitate the introduction of a large part of the morphosyntax. If, for example, you were dealing with 'Requests for Information', you would have to deal with all the tenses, since the realisation of that function is not limited to a given tense. Conversely, the introduction of a single element of morphosyntax would necessitate the introduction of a large number of functions.

The third possibility is excluded on linguistic grounds, since there is no one-to-one relationship between functions and the morphosyntax.

Only the fourth possibility remains, and so it is the one that we have chosen. In our Beginners' Course, the functions and the morpho-syntax are learnt at the same time, but separately. They also differ according to whether they are being taught for comprehension or expression.

a) Comprehension:

No progression whatsoever of either the functions or the morphosyntax: the necessary systematisation is carried out by means of regular revision exercises.

b) Expression:

two separate progressions:

(i) Morphosyntax: "traditional" progression

(ii) Functions : a progression going from 'set phrases' such as "how are you?" "very well, thank you" - where the utterance is to be produced as a whole in the appropriate situations, - to 'set phrases' of the type "I am sorry I ... ", - where part of the utterance has to be constructed at the moment when it is produced in an appropriate situation.

General Plan of the course

The course is divided into two parts of unequal length:

a) the first part (which took 4 sessions of 4 hours each) consists of a general introduction, including

(i) An introduction to the concept of "a language function", based on the examination of verbal exchanges in the mother tongue (French).

(ii) An introduction to English intonation, based on the description given by Halliday (1970), followed by discrimination exercises on the tones and the place of tonic.

(iii) An introduction to the rhythm of English, based on Abercrombie (1966)

(iv) An introduction to the initial teaching alphabet, followed by exercises.

(v) An introduction to the basic morphosyntax of English, followed by exercises in the recognition of forms and constructions.

b) the second part (twenty-one sessions of 4 hours each) consists of a series of comprehension units and expression units, constructed in keeping with the progression and objectives described above. The form of the units depends on their contents and not on the time required to learn them.

Briefly, the units are used as follows:

Oral Comprehension: in the presence of a teacher

Oral Expression:

(i) Morphosyntax: successively

with the teacher (introduction, first phase of acquisition)

in semi-autonomy (acquisition)

with the teacher (re-use)

in semi-autonomy (revision)

(ii) Functions: successively
with the teacher (introduction, acquisition, re-use)
in semi-autonomy (revision)

It is to be noted that each unit includes a cassette recording of the texts used in class followed by exercises and additional texts.

2. The use of authentic materials

What are authentic materials? Authentic materials consist of any language materials, either oral or written, produced for native, first-language audiences or individuals by native speakers or writers whose purposes do not include language teaching: (recordings of conversations between language assistants who know that what they are saying will be used for language teaching are not considered authentic.) Authentic materials will therefore consist mainly of recordings of television and radio programmes of every possible description, newspapers, magazines, letters and books.

Why use authentic materials instead of constructed materials?
Because

a) despite all their attempts at versimilitude, constructed materials are immediately and instinctively recognizable as such. This is due either to the (over)-simplifications (both linguistic and rhetorical) inherent in most constructed materials, or to the little theoretical knowledge (other than the basic phonological-syntactical and textual) we have of the suprasegmental, rhetorical, kinesic, etc. features of discourse which are therefore not easily reproducible in constructed materials.

b) authentic materials afford approximation of real "communication" situations: listening to the radio, watching T.V., reading the press.

c) in most cases it would be cheaper to use authentic materials than produce costly television or radio programmes (e.g. "Slim John", "Port of Secrets", etc. ...)

d) authentic materials are available in many countries (to

varying degrees) to most of our student audiences (professional publications, letters, reports; newspapers, magazines and books; short wave radio broadcasts; non-dubbed films ...). This in turn helps to take the language learning process out of the traditonal classroom and the teacher's omnipotent control.

Who can we use authentic materials with?

Everybody. Authentic materials should be used at all levels (not only the advanced ones). They are particularly suitable for training in aural and reading comprehension, and in writing (letters, reports, scientific articles ...). They appear to be less suitable for training in oral expression (see H. Holec "Cours initial d'anglais oral: une approche fonctionnelle" page 22 in Mélanges Pédagogiques C.R.A.P.E.L. 1975), but can help to demonstrate various suprasegmental, rhetorical, kinesic, proxemic and other features of spontaneous oral communication.

How can we select and grade authentic materials?

Selection will be based on the language skills to be taught and on the students' levels of attainment. For instance, in aural comprehension, beginners will use only British English recordings (television commercials, BBC radio programmes) whereas the subsequent levels will be introduced to all kinds of varieties of English. In reading comprehension, on the other hand, extracts and whole articles from the British and American press are used from the very outset of the learning process.

Pragmatic and intuitive technical, lexical, suprasegmental and cultural criteria are, of course, applied in selecting the documents. How good is the recording? How interesting is it? Is the dialect spoken standard enough? How does the document relate to the students' interests? (In the case of reaching comprehension and writing, and occasionally in the case of the oral skills, one can ask the students to select the documents themselves, that is, if they have a supply of personal (professional or other) documents.).

As for grading, the concept has been redefined by Tim Johns in the following terms:

"(grading) is ... transferred from control over the text itself to the degree of help that is given the student in handling the text."

3. The development of autonomy

As far as possible, we have tried to adopt an approach to the teaching of English to adults which takes into consideration their special characteristics and conditions. That is, our approach has been formulated by accepting the restraints inherent in their situation and not by trying to impose a solution from above. Of course lip-service is frequently paid to this principle, but how often is it truly practised? Consider just one example: it is widely recognised in the field of adult education that a multiplicity of factors has rendered the traditional class impractical and inadequate as a teaching strategy, yet how often is the response a shrug of the shoulders, a muttered something about "necessary evils" - and evening class courses which regularly fold up half way through the year?

A strategy which truly respected the special conditions of adults would not seek to impose such a solution, failing as it does to allow for the facts that working people are severely limited as to where and when they can study, that a growing number of professions involve shift-work, that increasing mobility makes people reluctant to sign on for even one year of evening classes, that they get tired and ill and married, go on holiday, have most of their free time at the weekends - in short, that they do not lead lives of clockwork routine. The logical conclusion - that instruction for adults should as far and as early as possible be freed from time-and-place restrictions - is just not faced.

A similar consideration concerns the motivation of adult learners: in our experience at least, the adult who undertakes language instruction of some kind does so for relatively precise reasons, usually professional ones. This means that it is possible to define and order his learning priorities according to his ability to use the language in certain precise types of communication situations - using the telephone, for example, compiling a report or abstract, listening to a lecture on his specialisation or asking a question from the floor, making travel arrangements, classifying invoices, describing his work to visitors, or any of the other but specifiable uses to which a language can be put.

So far, so good: but a further consequence of this plethora

of objectives is the logical one that each individual will have his own particular set. Not only does this militate against the use, or at least the usefulness, of most courses and textbooks - they are insufficiently specific - but it conflicts with the most basic assumption of traditional classroom teaching, namely, that all those present need to learn the same things. The first of these factors implies the modular presentation of prepared materials, which will be by and large ephemeral or "over-specialised": the second, pedagogic autonomy. By pedagogic autonomy we mean self-instruction in the fullest possible sense, including the provision of materials, with the aim of linguistic autonomy within the defined communication situation. In other words, a teaching strategy which respects the special conditions of the adult learner will be one which enables him to teach himself and to be himself.

The main objectives of our courses, then, are linguistic autonomy and pedagogic autonomy. By linguistic autonomy we mean that the learner has reached a level where he is able to deal alone in a psychologically satisfactory way with a particular communication situation. He must feel competent, and to this extent the precise level at which linguistic autonomy is reached will always remain a function of the individual learner's personality. Of course he must also be competent: however, there is no question of our trying to produce imitation native Englishmen, (in the very widest sense of social comportment) as even if it were practicable to do so, it would probably not be desirable. This level is rather to be defined in terms of a minimum adequacy, below which there is a failure in communication, but at the same time taking into account the individual's psychological and sociocultural characteristics.

In our strategy, linguistic autonomy is acquired in two stages, 'Systematic' and 'Non-systematic', corresponding approximately to 'Classroom' and 'Semi-autonomous' study. During the systematic stage the student acquires the morpho-syntactic base of the language, following a pre-determined order, and usually as a member of a group working with a teacher. The twelve courses referred to above are used mainly at this stage, and the individual's specific objectives are given only very general consideration, - an orientation towards the spoken rather than the written form, for example. As can be seen, taken in isolation, this stage is in many respects highly traditional, making use as it does of prepared texts, classrooms, teachers and groups. Depending on the

individual it can take anything between three and twelve months.

During the non-systematic stage, the student is able to choose from a wide range of options: the materials are designed to meet specified needs and objectives, such as 'Oral Comprehension: Conferences, scientific', and they are independent of one another. The learner can follow one course or several courses at a time and in any order he wishes. Although he works alone, or in a small unsupervised group ('autonomy' is most definitely not synonymous with 'isolation') advice and information are available to him, by telephone, or perhaps through radio broadcasts, or on his visits to the sound library. Since the learner is now working on prepared self-access materials, it is best to describe his pedagogical situation as one of semi-autonomy. However, one of the main purposes of the self-access materials will be to show him the materials and techniques which are available to him, that is, to prepare him for full autonomy. Once a student has been introduced to, say, a recording of a relevant radio broadcast and has been shown how to use it efficiently, he is often in a position to make further such recordings for himself. In doing so, he has made the transition from semi- to full pedagogical autonomy. It is perhaps important to emphasise that level of attainment and level of autonomy do not necessarily correspond: a beginner can be highly autonomous, an "advanced" student might be completely dependent on a formal classroom course. It follows, too, that the same course materials - no matter at what level they are aimed - may be used by students working semi-autonomously.

The strategy which has been outlined, with its emphasis on the development of autonomy and the provision of self-access materials, demands a well-equipped and well-stocked sound library: we are fortunate in having this, as well as a new vidéothèque and an ample amount of ancillary equipment, such as rapid-copiers and cassette-players for home-loan use.

For a learner to become truly autonomous, certain preparatory steps need to be taken and certain conditions need to be met. First, he must be prepared both from the psychological and technical points of view. Psychologically, he must be capable of a degree of objectivity concerning the process and progress of his learning, and this means in particular that he must fully accept the absence

of a teacher. Technically, he must have at his disposal a range of methodological tools (e.g. the use of the radio broadcasts mentioned earlier), including some descriptive knowledge of such linguistic concepts as register, grammar and lexis.

The conditions which must be met include the ability to define his objectives, his working conditions and the content and method of working, as well as to evaluate and adjust his progress. To meet these conditions, and to prepare the learner in the ways mentioned above, an increasing number of activities are introduced during the non-systematic stage which are directed at the acquisition of pedagogic autonomy. These include group sessions devoted to the topics which have been indicated, as well as practical demonstrations of different kinds of exercises, exchange of documents and information and so on.

A number of experiments involving autonomy have been carried out by the Centre. At present, one of the most ambitious is under way, concerning a group of 30 learners who are mostly complete beginners and who have not been able to follow a formal course at all.

Whether this particular ongoing experiment, involving a relatively small group of highly motivated adults studying ESL, was originally motivated by practical needs (compensating for the inadequacy of evening classes) or by the conviction to fostering learning instead of teaching the need to be taught, by providing a solution for adults who cannot or choose not to join classes, we are at the same time serving our own belief in self-motivated, self-directed learning: in the individuals' control of and responsibility for their own education, in the changing roles of the institution - now a resource centre, the teacher - now a helper, and the student - now a learner.

Adults come to us with a fairly clear picture of what they will have to do with their English. The separation of language skills is an obvious corollary to an autonomous learning scheme, for once they have recognized and defined their language needs, they can proceed to develop the skills necessary to the achievement of their goals.

A second corollary to an autonomous learning scheme is the use of authentic documents, which not only eliminates the eventual problem of transferring from materials constructed for teaching purposes to authentic materials, but also shows the learner how to incorporate material that is readily available to him through the media, into his own learning process.

Learners are the central element in our autonomous learning scheme. The learning process, then, may be considered as a branching outward toward various learning possibilities of their own choice.

For instance, an organic chemist planning to give a paper at a conference in the United States has access to any or all of the following:

Material:

1 Cassettes and accompanying texts to be used at home (for improving oral comprehension and expression);

2. our sound library, which provides a wide range of both course tapes and authentic radio recordings and T.V. broadcasts from England and the United States;

Peers:

3. autonomous learners at similar levels of proficiency may be matched up to conversation in the earlier stages. These meetings have proved useful both in breaking down the barriers to informal conversation shared by so many of the learners and in allowing learners to verbalize the problems encountered in autonomous learning.

Native speakers:

4. a network of native speakers of English has also been developed by the C.R.A.P.E.L., so as to allow learners to engage in spontaneous conversation in real situations.

Simulation:

5. Having prepared his presentation for the conference, this chemist may want to have a trial run before actually delivering his speech in the United States. We can then help him simulate that situation - that is, have him present his speech and slides in the presence of a competent audience (members of his own research laboratory) likely to ask questions, make comments and simulate the kind of interaction which he will later have to be able to deal with.

The helper:

6. In this strategy, the helper too becomes a resource used differently in function to the learners' needs. The helper may be involved in the technical, linguistic, methodological, or psychological preparation of the learner for semi-autonomy, in other words, during periodic meetings, whose frequency is

determined by the learners, make sure they know how to use the material provided, clear up any language problems they may have, question them on their study techniques and perhaps suggest other effective ways of learning, and perhaps most importantly, deal with learners as total persons, subject to doubts, preconceived ideas about and attitudes towards language learning and autonomous learning.

This is but an incomplete description of a scheme that has been evolving constantly over the past two years.

The conditions for autonomous learning being met, learners become increasingly confident and efficient at defining their own needs and setting their own goals, choosing materials, developing effective learning techniques, determining their pace of study, monitoring and evaluating their own performances: in sum, they achieve not only linguistic autonomy but pedagogic autonomy at the same time, thereby freeing themselves somewhat from dependence on any institution.

The autonomous learning scheme seems to be a logical response to people's needs, and the flexibility of the C.R.A.P.E.L. has allowed us to adopt solutions which tend to discredit many of the fears voiced by sceptics, concerning the dangers of self-correction, the absence of human contacts, the difficulties in creating natural, authentic linguistic situations, and the maintaining of motivation in autonomous learning situations.

In fact, many of the a-priori ideas we ourselves had two years ago, have since been modified, for this experiment has demonstrated that

- beginners can survive in autonomy;
- learners having either professional or personal motivations can succeed in autonomy;
- autonomy is effective for both intensive and extensive models of learning.

APPENDIX 1

Information on the C.R.A.P.E.L.

The C.R.A.P.E.L. is a teachers' research association: there are usually about 12 full members, membership being effectively by invitation, with an elected Director (at present M. Henri Holec). All members are applied linguists, although their specialised interests vary greatly, and all are experienced and practicing teachers. There are no C.R.A.P.E.L. posts as such: individual members are usually on the staff of one of the University departments.

Some 40 - 50 other teachers are associated with the C.R.A.P.E.L., most of them being employed on a part-time basis to man the various courses in English for which the Centre is responsible, but whose participation in the Centre's activities is by no means necessarily limited to teaching as they are regarded as an invaluable source of new ideas, feedback and recruitment.

The internal organisation of the C.R.A.P.E.L. is not hierarchical. Rather, it is based on the 'project-group'; that is, the work of the Centre is carried out by sub-groups of members, with each group focusing on a particular problem or field and with an overall equality of groups. Individual groups may be long- or short-lived, and most members belong to several groups simultaneously, his or her contribution changing from group to group. Again, the individual member is free to leave or join projects as he wishes, or to establish a new group. It is an essential characteristic of such a work-style that there is no question of 'Heads of Department' with 'junior staff' working 'for' or 'under' them. Questions of personality and academic competence apart, the hierarchical bureaucratic model favours certain types of solution, reduces feedback considerably and necessitates the compartmentalisation which is so antipathetic to research in an interdisciplinary field such as applied linguistics.

Organisation in 'project groups', on the other hand, facilitates the lateral exchange of ideas and information between groups and by increasing the operational flexibility of individual groups, enables them to respond more swiftly and directly to the nature of the

problem or task under investigation. This is particularly true, of course, where 'one-off' problems are concerned. In general, the immediate and practical application of current research is given priority over further academic refinement. In these ways, then, it is hoped that a given group will evolve in response to the needs and aims of the research problem itself, rather than to those of the administrative or academic hierarchy.

Research projects

At present, the C.R.A.P.E.L. has groups working on the following themes:

1. Discourse analysis, with teams working on the structure of verbal interaction; intonation and key; paralanguage; non-verbal communication. A government research grant has been received for a study of the verbal and non-verbal elements in small-group interaction.
2. French for immigrant workers: a comparative study of the various literacy and language courses available, including pedagogic, linguistic and methodological analysis on the basis of controlled experimentation.
3. Written comprehension and expression, with emphasis on learner-difficulties arising from graphic, discursive and communicative features rather than from the morphology or syntax. A team is concentrating on the discursive structures of specialised English (e.g. medical English).
4. Teaching strategies - a series of alternatives to traditional classroomteacher- course teaching (see below: autonomous lerarning)
5. English for specialised purposes: this is in fact a series of concrete projects, where specialised demands from particular groups (firms, hospitals, etc.) are individually analyzed and catered for. These include: medical English, reading of specialised articles, chairing conferences, computer programming, instruction sheets for machine operatives, etc.
6. Oral English for beginners: an attempt to put into practice the teaching of "communicative competence" definition of contents, progressions, methodology; production and evaluation of materials. A one-year course has been held and is now to be revised.
7. Educational techonology: a research and documentation centre is being

created alongside the C.R.A.P.E.L. which will act as a clearing-house for information on educational technology applied to language-learning.

8. Sound library. As an attempt to benefit from sound- and video-tapes without imposing the outworn language-laboratory system, the C.R.A.P.E.L. has established a 62-place sound and television library where students can work individually. (The latest in a long series of experiments on language laboratories, recorded materials, etc.)
9. T.V. teaching: Together with the Universities of Utrecht, Louvain, Trèves and Lancaster, the C.R.A.P.E.L. is preparing a series of 36 radio and T.V. broadcasts in applied linguistics for teachers of English. The Centre has also just acquired a T.V. studio, which is to act as a T.V. service centre to the University.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Further details of any of the projects mentioned are included in the Centre's annual Rapport Scientifique (available free on request) and in the Centre's journal, the Mélanges Pédagogiques, (annually, by subscription).

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WHO NEEDS A TEACHER? - AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE "CONVERSATION CLASS"

> "The kind of English lesson most often sought by foreign students is the 'conversation' lesson. Outside England, these lessons take place in many different environments: in the high school classroom, in adult education institutes, in study circles, in private homes. Very often these lessons are calamitous failures."
> Colin Black: A Handbook of Free Conversation

Agreed; though there are now a number of good handbooks which can help the teacher to avoid such failure. In this article I want to describe an alternative approach to achieving the aims of conversation classes, the central feature of which is the absence of the teacher altogether. This alternative approach is in use with first year students in the English department at the University of Joensuu and is specifically geared to our requirements but it may be of interest to other teachers at a similar level.

It is not easy to get into a university English department in Finland: the number of applicants greatly exceeds the number of places available. Consequently, it can be assumed that those students who are accepted have achieved a fairly high level of competence in the language. In general, their strengths and weaknesses would appear to be: the possession of a good passive vocabulary and a firm grasp of structure; considerable experience in reading and writing English; possibly less experience in listening to natural spoken English; and for the most part little experience in spontaneously speaking the language, together with a lack of confidence in their ability to do so.

Accordingly, the first year of studies at this department lays considerable emphasis on aural and oral skills. Our overall aims with respect to oral skills are that:

* the student should be able to express himself fluently, correctly, and as far as possible in the appropriate register in the following

situations:

(a) general conversation and informal discussion;
(b) asking for information of a general nature;
(c) giving information of a general nature;
(d) discussion on topics within the field of English studies (ie, effective class/seminar participation)."

We have structured courses aimed at helping students meet requirements (a) and (b). This article describes the course we call LANG 7 which is aimed at helping students to meet requirement (a) - and also, indirectly, (d).

Fluency must include confidence and lack of confidence is surely one of the main reasons for failure in a conversation class. In the Finnish context this is often ascribed to the shyness of students, which, in turn, is attributed to a reluctance to expose themselves in front of their fellow students. Our experience with LANG 7 suggests that this is not the whole story: if there is an inhibiting factor it is the presence of the teacher. LANG 7 does away with the immediate presence of the teacher in the belief that the confidence students build up among themselves will carry over into teacher-led classes. So the aim of LANG 7 can be restated as to give students confidence in their ability to express themselves in English, to remove any inhibitions they may have about speaking English among themselves and to provide a solid foundation for the discussion work required in other classes and seminars.

Attendance at the course is more or less compulsory. The new intake of students is divided into groups of four or five students each. One hour a week is timetabled for a group discussion and a small room set aside for the purpose. At each session the group, under the leadership of a chairman, discusses a topic of their own choosing and these discussions are recorded and later monitored by the teacher. Comment and advice is given when the tape is returned for the following session. This lasts for thirteen weeks and the final session, in the fourteenth week of term, constitutes the examination.

The size of the group is important: fewer than four seems to throw too much work on the individual student while more than five gives some students a chance to opt out of the discussion. Some students are inevitably rather quiet while others tend to dominate the discussion in the early sessions. This is only natural and it is pointed out that it is not necessary to be talking all the time but heavy talkers are tactfully asked to encourage the others and the chairman can be directed to engage

the quieter students. It must also be said that an occasional complete silence is quite natural: the students should not be in a state of high tension all the time.

The role of the chairman is crucial. This is rotated from week to week so that everyone gets a chance to take the chair two or three times in the course of a term. Quieter students tend to find their tongues when they have the responsibility of organising a good discussion. The group decide each topic collectively, but it is the chairman's job to research the subject, prepare some notes on discussion points and steer the discussion itself. If the chairman has prepared his work diligently - and most do - the discussion goes well. If he is ill-prepared then it goes badly, of course, but the other members of the group are quick to see why and this motivates them to do better next time.

The actual topic is unimportant but not the fact that it is chosen by the group. One drawback of the "conversation class" seems to be that the topic is "given" and this decreases motivation. In actual fact, though, the topics chosen are fairly conventional so it would seem to be the act of choosing that matters. Students discuss things like religion, marriage, divorce, abortion, mercy-killing, free-time activities etc... Occasionally they choose a topic that is difficult to talk about. "Music", for instance, tends to result in a "Do you like ...?" "Yes, I do." sort of interchange. But this is exceptional. Not all discussions are successful but again this is only natural and students are told not to be worried about an occasional bad week.

Why the tape-recorder? There are various reasons. For one thing, it is useful for students to tackle and overcome "mike fright" early on in their studies. More importantly, it provides them with immediate motivation: if the discussion is going to be listened to there is a strong incentive to say something. Moreover, it enables the teacher not only to check the progress of the group but also to get some idea of the strengths and weaknesses of each member, though this is something that is kept very much in the background. Finally, the students' performances are going to be examined by means of a taped discussion; after thirteen weeks the tape-recorder is simply part of the furniture.

We think it important to plunge the student right in at the deep end so that he does not get time to think about and worry about the tape-recorder and so it is used from the very first session. The students are first shown how to operate the tape-recorder (we use a two-track

Tandberg which is simple to operate). Then the microphone is set up on a table, at some distance from the machine. The machine is switched on and the teacher sits down with the students and explains the purpose and procedure of the course. The students are told - and from experience we can say this quite truthfully - that at first they will naturally be very conscious of the microphone but after a week or two they will be able to ignore it. It is suggested that they get to know each other - where they come from etc...- and decide the topic of their first discussion. The teacher then withdraws and leaves them to it.

Between each session the tapes are monitored, a task which is shared among the department teaching staff. Feedback on language is kept to an absolute minimum because improvement of students' language competence is not the aim of this course; it is more a matter of activating what language they already possess. In fact, it is emphasised at the very beginning that correctness of pronunciation, grammar etc... is less important here than a willingness to speak. This anti-language bias is corrected in other courses. But there may be a word that students have been struggling for during their discussion, or a word that has been consistently misused (one recent example: "hypocratic" for "hypocritical") and this can be corrected. If a discussion has gone well, this is said. If a discussion has been poor, some remedies are suggested for next time. There appear to be three main reasons for poor discussions: the timetable hour may be unsuitable (it may come at the end of a heavy day); the chairman is inadequately prepared; the topic is intrinsically difficult. The timetable hour can be easily changed and advice given on the other points.

The examination is conducted in exactly the same way. The criteria for passing a student are:

that he has something to say;

that he is able to say it;

that he is able to say it intelligibly.

In the course of the three-quarters of an hour examination almost all our students have been able to meet these requirements. A very few do not. These students are advised as to why they have not succeeded and given an opportunity to try again the following term. If there are enough of them they are tested as a group: if not they are asked to co-opt some of their fellow students to make up a group. No student has been unable to pass the second time.

LANG 7 seems to be generally popular. When students first arrive at university their motivation is high and we think this course exploits this

motivation. We have had "guest appearances" from other groups sitting in and contributing to a discussion and on several occasions the members of a group have become so involved in their discussion that they have not only continued well beyond the allotted hour but turned over the tape and recorded the continuation. As a side effect, the course also performs the useful social function of helping new students to get to know each other.

Does it work? In the sense that the students do carry out their discussions competently and do meet the examination requirements, yes. In the wider sense of its having an enhancing effect on other class activites it is difficult to say. The course has only been in operation for two years and with very small numbers of students. It is probably not yet effectively followed up but we see no reason in principle why a certain amount of seminar work could not be run on similar lines. If there are others who have tried out similar courses, we should very much like to hear from them.

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SOME CURRENT PROBLEMS IN LANGUAGE TESTING

1.0. It can be argued that the "state of the art" in language testing is currently quite advanced: with the aid of modern techniques of sound, text and picture reproduction and electronic data processing facilities, various aspects of SL skills can be taught and tested in a far more sophisticated way than, say, 10 - 15 years ago. Several factors have contributed to the present situation. On the "hardware" side, the large-scale adoption of tape recorders and language laboratories has made it possible to bring the native speaker into the classroom. Computer technology and the introduction of calculating machines permit the analyses of tests at a speed and level of sophistication impossible for our older colleagues and predecessors. On the "software" side, on the other hand, there have been very important developments in techniques of educational and psychological measurement, accompanied by advances in theories of language, language learning and language teaching. Clearly, our knowledge in these areas has increased tremendously. Further, changes in society and in educational policies have brought concomitant changes in aims of language teaching. Currently there is a shift of emphasis towards teaching "real-life" language skills, or "communicative competence". Such changes will naturally bring new aims and challenges into language testing as well. Two further factors must still be mentioned: the increased importance of testing, and the necessity to cope with large members of testees. As admission to most of our university departments has had to be restricted, entrance tests have come to play a crucial role in admission to higher education, as well as in various kinds of course placement and student guidance. With large numbers of testees, the decisions concerning the choice of types of tests are bound to be affected by considerations of economy of measurement and availability of resources at the departments.

In this paper, I shall try to outline some of the current problems in language testing - problems do exist, in spite of the advanced state of the art! I will first discuss some tehcnical problems, and then point out some current trends in language teaching, to see what implications they have for language testing.

1. Technical problems

1.1. Reliability. The aim should be accurate measurements with a high degree of reliability. This relates to the question "to what extent could the same result be obtained, if the measurement were to be repeated, by using the same test or a parallel version of it?" Reliability is a mathematical concept that depends on various factors such as the length of the test, the number of (multiple-choice) alternatives, the level of difficulty (amount of dispersion), scoring methods, and consistency of discrimination ("internal consistency"), etc. Several methods have been proposed for assessing reliability with the aid of statistical formulas. The output of such formulas, called reliability index, is a figure that can range from .00 to 1.00. For tests that are going to be used as a basis for important decisions, the normal requirement is that the reliability index should be of the order of .90 or more. From the viewpoint of reliability, a distinction is usually made between "objective" and "subjective" tests, of which the latter are generally assumed to have poorer reliability (cf. marking of an essay vs. scoring of a multiple-choice test).

1.2. Validity. When reviewing the validity of tests, at least the following questions would need an answer: "what do we want to measure?"; "is our test a representative sample of the universe (e.g., course syllabus) we want to measure?"; "does it cover the relevant aspects of the language skills we want to include in the test?", etc. Validity is a crucial concept in any measurement, and it presupposes reliability: for a test to be a valid measure of anything, it must also have a satisfactory reliability. But we should not, however, "sacrifice" the validity of our tests to considerations of high reliability, or economy. What I mean by this is that, if we want to measure our students' ability to express themselves in an SL, there is probably no other way for doing this properly than have them talk and assess the performance subjectively, no matter how time-consuming or unreliable such measurement may be. Considerations of economy and reliability are certainly going to be one of the major obstacles in

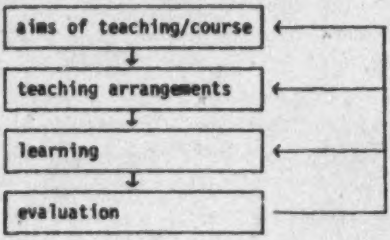
efforts to measure communicative competence. The big question will be the extent to which the relevant skills and components can be separately and objectively measured via multiple-choice techniques, and to what extent such measurement must be supplemented by a series of situational tests, i.e., samples of real-life situations. The usual distinction here is that between "discrete-point" and "integrative" tests. The former refer to testing single linguistic phenomena in isolation (e.g., recognizing the distinction between ship-sheep-ship), while the latter combine simultaneously several linguistic levels and language components (cf. listening comprehension). More research is needed to clarify the relationship between these, i.e., to what extent integrative performance can be predicted from scores on discrete-point tests.

1.3. Efficiency of measurement: the problem of "yield" vs. "investment". Any testing involves substantial investments of time, money and resources, both of our own and our students'. It is natural, therefore, that tests should be reviewed in terms of the "yield", or economy of measurement. These factors would need consideration at all stages of testing: a) planning and constructing of the tests, b) administration of them to the students, c) marking or scoring, and d) interpretation of the results. More specifically; a) "how can we translate the aims of teaching and testing into specific tests and items?"; "how laborious is the construction of the tests?"; "how do considerations of test security affect our planning; can the same test be used again, or do we have to design parallel versions of the test, and how much time does this require?"; b) "does the administration of our tests require special facilities (tape recorders, projectors etc.) and expert technical knowledge?"; "in large-scale examinations, can we secure identical conditions of administration?"; "can we make sure that students know what they are expected to do and what they are assessed for?"; c) "how much time does the scoring require; can it be done automatically (by computer)?"; "how can we secure maximal reliability with subjective marking?"; d) "are the scores easy to interpret?"; "is the information relevant, i.e., do our tests have sufficient and consistent discriminatory power?"; "is it desirable that we should also get diagnostic information from our test?", etc. While maximal efficiency of measurement is the aim this also should not take place at the expence of reliability and

validity. All these factors need to be considered in the light of the objectives of the test. The reconciliation of these requirements is - and surely will be - one of the persistent problems in language testing.

2. Testing in the context of SL learning and instruction

2.1. The problem of "backwash". It is a commonplace that testing does not take place in a vacuum. Testing, or evaluation, is an integral part of learning in any course, syllabus or teaching programme, as seen in the following figure:



The teacher thus first sets the aims of the course he is going to give, or he has them ready in accepted syllabuses. In the light of these aims, he makes his teaching arrangements: choice of material, teaching methods, audio-visual aids, concrete solutions to didactic problems of presentation, etc. The outcome is student learning, which is evaluated by means of suitable tests.

As the arrows show, test results are used to evaluate both the aims set and the teaching arrangements made. The evaluation of the aims requires that they must be so stated as to be evaluable in concrete terms. If the evaluation shows that the aims were not reached in a satisfactory way, this must be due to something being wrong either about the aims, the teaching arrangements, or the students, or all of these (supposing that our tests are valid and reliable measures of the students' terminal behavior). All too easily, perhaps, we teachers tend to blame the students. Instead, we should ask questions such as "were the aims concrete enough to be measurable?"; "were they pitched too high or low?"; "was the quality of teaching too poor?"; "what alternative teaching arrangements could be tried?"; "would remedial instruction help the low achievers?" It is only in connection with such questions that we should also look into the aptitude and motivation of the students and ask, perhaps, whether they

had a necessary level of background knowledge required for a successful completion of the course. If such knowledge is necessary, it might be advisable to administer a pre-test before the course and admit only those who pass the desirable limit, or arrange remedial instruction before the actual course to those who did not pass the selection test.

All this means that tests must be congruent with the aims and practices of teaching. The central role of tests in SL teaching is well-known: they tend to concretize the aims both of teachers and of pupils. Thus, in our secondary schools, tests have a powerful "backwash" effect on teaching, and a large portion of it in the upper forms turns into explicit preparation for the matriculation examination. The situation is in no way unique to Finland. As I do not know a better way of putting this problem, I quote Pilliner (1968:31): "It is axiomatic that (the) content (of tests) inevitably influences the teaching and learning which precede them...Properly constructed, (the test) can foster and reinforce good teaching and sound learning and discourage their opposites. To achieve these ends, the test constructor must start with a clear conception ot the aims and purposes of the area of learning to which his test is relevant." Tests may thus both exert a retarding influence on the evolution of SL instruction, and they may encourage up-to-date teaching.

2.2. "Focus on the learner" and "individual instruction" are current slogans in language didactics. Behind these catchphrases lies the fact that students differ enormously in their learning habits and preferences. They should therefore be provided with opportunities of attaining the degree of mastery in SL that is consistent with their language aptitude, willingness to devote time and energy, perseverance, interests, and aims for using the SL. As teachers will also differ in their habits of teaching, one method may be better suited to a given teacher than some other method. But the choice of method also depends on what kind of learning is aimed at. Thus, for example, a lecture-type of teaching may be good for imparting basic knowledge of the discipline, while higher levels of learning in the Bloomian taxonomy (e.g., application) would probably be better achieved by more student-centered methods. Therefore, ideas of a single, monolithic method and identical learning materials are no longer tenable. A move towards individualized instruction involves, within the resources available,

"tailor-made" instruction that is congruent with students' personal aims. Here, the usual distinction is that between the "norm-referenced" and "criterion-referenced" tests, or, in terms of marking, "relative" and "absolute" marking. The former compare individual achievement with the norm set by the group, and the marks may vary depending on the standard of the group. The latter tests, on the other hand, set individual aims for each student and assess his progress towards this goal. Obviously we cannot altogether do without norm-referenced tests, since there are occasions where information is needed also about the rank-order of the individuals (cf. entrance tests). But their traditional role in this country could surely be reduced. This would probably lead to a considerable change in the atmosphere of our SL classes: there would be less competition, fewer frustrated low-achievers, and more emphasis on testing as part of learning, not as an end in itself. On the other hand, this would make the teacher's job more difficult: instead of setting one paper to the whole class, he might have to set several. The solutions to these problems remain to be worked out.

2.3. From "pseudo-communication" to "communicative competence". Recently there has been a growing awareness of the importance of real-life use of SL as a major goal of instruction. This has been contrasted with the notion of "pseudo-communication" or "language-like behaviour". Rivers makes a useful distinction between 1) skill-getting and 2) skill-using in SL learning. The former comprises the basic cognitive knowledge of the target language (phonology, structure, lexicon), and what she calls "pseudo-communication": student manipulation of the language via drills, exercises and other guided activities. This is the basic core of the target language, or the "micro-language". The notion of 'skill-using', on the other hand, refers to real communication, to an autonomous interaction of an individual with other individuals. This is the "macro-language" level of SL learning, which should be the ultimate aim in instruction. To teach this, students should be encouraged to use the SL as much as possible, in natural and meaningful situations, and every effort should be made to foster their creativity.

From the viewpoint of testing, the micro-language level is more readily measurable by objective, quick-to-score multiple-choice items. It would therefore be tempting to concentrate on testing micro-language and leave the macro-language level largely untested. However, such

a limited scope of testing would probably lead to neglecting the teaching of communicative competence. There seems to be no way out of direct tests of production, both written and spoken. If we neglect such tests, we should not be surprised if our students think that "pseudo-communication" is what performance in SL really is. More research is needed towards developing tests of production which are as economical and objective as possible. Multiple-choice techniques could be used to some extent, but the contextualization of the items will surely vex the ingenuity of the test designers. A promising avenue is provided by the cloze technique, which combines some of the advantages of multiple-choice and subjective tests. In cloze tests, testees are asked to fill in the gaps made in a continuous passage of text, on the basis of the cues provided by the context (for further details of the cloze tests, cf. Kohonen (ed.) 1976, and Oller's Bibliography 1975).

2.4. Should we count errors or measure success? It is well-known that penalizing students for errors makes them over-conscious of the correct use of the language and tends to stifle their initiative for spontaneous expression. On the other hand, leaving the errors uncorrected will lead to inaccurate learning. We should obviously be able to work out some kind of compromise between the two poles. The crucial question is, "how much accuracy should we require, if effective communication is to be our primary goal?"

Part of the solution might be provided by the above distinction between micro and macro-language. In micro language - if agreement can be reached as to what it should contain - there would be clearly defined performance objectives, with accuracy being an important goal as such, in all the levels and skills of the target language. Students would work through their task of learning the essential facts about the SL accurately, and they would be tested on these at appropriate stages. This "core" would be rehearsed until the desirable level of mastery is achieved by the whole group. In macro-language, on the other hand, the major goal would be free expression. Therefore, minor details of pronunciation, grammar or lexicon could be ignored, as long as they do not hamper the effectiveness of communication. In teaching, both kinds of language use could be taught simultaneously, in different lessons or parts of

the same lesson. During the "real communication" lessons, the teacher should encourage students to use the language freely and not bother about details of grammar or phonology. He should, however, note the kinds of errors the students typically make and take these up later on a suitable occasion, either individually or in front of the whole class. In testing communicative competence, students might be given real communication tasks, and their performance would be assessed in terms of their success in the task, instead of counting the individual errors made.

Another factor affecting the level of accuracy to be required is the purpose for which the student wants to learn the SL. If he is only going to need it, say, for purposes of tourism, the aim probably need not be set very high as far as accuracy is concerned. On the other hand, if he is planning to enter, for example, international business or a scientific career, or hoping to become a language teacher, the level of requirement would obviously have to be pitched higher. In such a case, the student is also better motivated to invest more time and energy on the learning task. Thus, the problem of accuracy must be seen in the light of the communicative goals aimed at by the student. This once again means that instruction should be individualized, as far as possible within resources.

2.5. Concluding remarks. This paper has, I am afraid, been devoted more to problems of testing than to concrete suggestions as to how to solve them. My excuse is that this is what my title promises, and nothing more; practical solutions are offered in several of the works cited in the Bibliography. Besides, it is difficult to give any definite answers to the problems, as we do not as yet know enough of the theoretical and practical matters. More research and experimental field work is needed to develop better methods of assessing our students' language skills. We are in a better position than formely to do such work, as there are some fairly well established theoretical principles and aims of testing, and we have the necessary data processing technology available. The problem is rather how to reconcile some of the requirements and needs outlined above, such as considerations of efficiency of measurement with the testing of productive skills. But we cannot afford to wait for possible solutions by doing nothing. We have to teach and test our students as part of our daily work.

Some of the confusion about language testing is probably caused by the fact that testing has several fuctions in instruction. As pointed out above, tests are necessary for the evaluation of the aims and the teaching given; the teacher thus cannot do without testing. But tests are also necessary for the student: they give him information about his ability to learn languages, they may predict his success in later studies and job tasks, and thus guide his decision-making about entering a given course, studies programme or a career. Tests may further guide his process of learning by directing his efforts towards the goal and showing where he has difficulties; this could be called the motivating and guiding function of evaluation. Furthermore, tests may be used as a research tool in the study of readability of texts, and in contrastive studies and error analyses. In such studies the results, frequently in terms of population means, are used as a basis for making inferences about the language (cf., e.g., the cloze tests). Finally, tests are also needed for administrative reasons, such as student selection. For these purposes a distinction is made between achievement, diagnostic, aptitude, and proficiency tests; the terminology is by no means fixed (cf. also 'formative' and 'summative' tests in the theory of mastery learning). These different fuctions of evaluation set partly different requirements as to the shape of SL tests. Thus, for example, diagnostic tests are typically short and easy, and are only meant to reveal incomplete learning. In entrance tests, on the other hand, the problems may be quite different: if the rate of admission is only some 20 per cent, as it is currently at our departments of English, the tests must be quite difficult, if they are to function properly, i.e., discriminate effectively the top fourth among which the selection will take place. Further, entrance tests should have predictive validity. This means that they should be able to select students that are likely to be successful in their studies and later jobs (cf. teacher training).

All too often, we probably attempt to achieve several of these conflicting aims by using one and the same test where we should ideally use several. No wonder that results have sometimes been disappointing. What I mean by this is that there is no single solution to problems of SL testing. Problems will have to be solved case by case, depending on the purpose of testing: what kind of SL

command we want to measure, and what we need the information for. Thus the choice of the types of tests and items to be used must be considered in the light of current (and changing!) aims of teaching, purpose of testing, resources available, and the possible backwash effects; i.e., testing should be seen in the whole context of SL learning and teaching. Furthermore, as different countries may have varying educational policies and practices, and different language backgrounds are likely to cause different learning problems, testing should also be seen in a wider cultural context. We should therefore be alert to developments taking place in international research, but the ideas and results should be adapted, whenever necessary, to our own cultural environment and specific problems. Testing is thus an area we must study ourselves. We cannot leave it to others.[1]

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1) This is an expanded version of a paper read at the fourth conference of the departments of English, held at Oulu on March 18th-20th, 1976. I am grateful to Nils Erik Enkvist and Geoffrey Phillips for valuable comments.

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GROUP CONVERSATION AS A MEANS OF TEACHING AND TESTING SPOKEN LANGUAGE[1]

1. Teaching spoken language

The need to clearly recognise the difference in objectives between the teaching of practical language from the teaching of philology and literature has become increasingly apparent, as has the need to concentrate more on the teaching and practice of spoken language. This is particularly so in countries where the teaching of languages has been almost exlusively oriented towards the written language. Certainly the emphasis has to a certain extent changed, in that many, perhaps most, teachers nowadays base their instruction on the spoken language. There is, however, no doubt that too many pupils leave school having had almost no practice of actually speaking the language. Language laboratory instruction gives valuable practice in repetition, drilled responses, listening comprehension and very occasionally some practice in free oral composition, but these are not a satisfactory alternative to speaking the language as people do in normal life. Many pupils with a good knowledge of the language have some, even great, difficulty in using it in everyday speech situations. They need some kind of practice where they themselves have to produce language, using it as a means of communication, and not merely reproducing language artificially fed to them.

The language laboratory has been widely accepted as one solution to the problem of spoken language teaching, particularly because of its ability to cater for large numbers. Its limitations should be recognised, however, and it should be regarded as only one part of the teaching of spoken language. The practical problem of

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1) This paper is based on articles and research done in collaboration with Dave Robertson, Vaasa School of Economics.

large classes is an obvious deterrent to attempting other forms of spoken language teaching. Conversation in particular has often been ruled out as being impossible or ineffective, just because of the number of pupils. However, the conversation lesson can be such a useful part of a language syllabus that this problem, and others, must be overcome.

The goals of the conversation lesson must be clear in order to determine what the class can hope to achieve by this form of practice. They could be

a) the introduction and practice of the important elements of spoken language, including specific conversation language such as "gambits" ("What's your opinion?", "I see your point but ..."), "strategies" (such as how to disagree, butt in, show disapproval etc.), "stabilizers" (I mean, well, er) and the language of social relations ("How are you?", "Sorry").
b) the activation of passive knowledge, in all main areas, i.e. in lexis, grammatical structures, pronunciation.
c) the creation of a situation within the school or college environment which comes as close as possible to a real-life language situation where language skills can be practised together, as a whole.
d) a stimulation of interest in language learning through the novelty and comparative freedom of this kind of lesson.
e) to serve as an aid to other forms of language learning, for example reading and listening comprehension and essay-writing.

The conversation lesson

The situation can be helped by splitting a large class into groups of four to eight pupils, rearranging desks or chairs to form separate circles and by giving the groups a topic (maybe one of their own choice) to discuss with the help of prepared conversation material.

Ideally, the small groups should operate independently and freely, choosing which discussion points to take and developing them in their own way. One system could be for each group member to have to introduce and lead a discussion point during each lesson. This would mean that everyone has to speak and practise communicating, and it would entail their having to elicit from the other members of the group responses or opinions that could lead to a free and natural discussion.

The teacher's role should be limited to ensuring that discussion is taking place, that all group members are participating, and where

necessary assisting with vocabulary and structure prompts. The correction of errors should be kept to a minimum during actual discussion, but some can be noted down and used later in teaching. With advanced groups the teacher should take part, particularly if a native speaker, but only in the later stages, after all group members have had enough chance to speak.

Group conversation can achieve the aims of the conversation lesson when these aims and the situation are clearly defined, the topic is controlled by material structured to the learners' needs interest and level, and when the conversation is controlled by the learners themselves.

2. Testing spoken language

The testing of spoken language has been even more neglected than the teaching, but a test of a learner's language ability with the written medium, even when this includes a listening comprehension multiple-choice test, gives an incomplete picture of a person's ability. It can, of course, be argued that language learners may only need to have to read, and possibly to listen to, a foreign language, but it is doubtful today whether in fact people who really do need to be able to read a foreign language (apart from some specialists) will not also have to speak it at some time. There is a strong argument for teaching the learner first the spoken language, or at least via the spoken language, and that consequently the learner's knowledge will be better. The need for the spoken language is particularly important in countries where the language spoken is not a world language, and it would seem essential that in these countries a great emphasis should be placed not only on the teaching of spoken language but also on the testing of it.

Towards a test

The task for the language teacher is to produce a test which is a valid assessment of a learner's spoken language ability, and which is realistic, practical and reliable. Most writers in the field acknowledge the difficulties, if not the impossibility, of achieving this, particularly in relation to practical ability in spoken language, and to producing precise, technical assessment.

The need for tests of spoken ability should be apparent, but

what must be clarified is what kind of test should be used. Should the skills be tested separately? Can they be tested together and if so, what skills should be included? Should the test be subjective? Should it measure a learner's knowledge or ability? Can the testing of language be kept separate from personal, literary and cultural attitudes? There is also the practical problem of how to test classes of 25 or more. Is it enough to give them a listening comprehension test? Is a test in the laboratory enough? Does this kind of test give a true evaluation of a learner's language ability? Is it not the overall language ability that should be tested, and if so, how is it to be tested?

Testing overall ability can only be successful in a situation where all the language skills are being used at the same time, such as in conversation, but not as in the forced, special language of the interview, or in a limited number of specially prepared prompt questions, neither in the semi-spoken language of lecturettes or debate, and neither in the distinctly limited form of reading, reciting and repetition. Normal conversation, or discussion, presents a use of all the language skills that can be judged as a whole or separately, but particularly as they are used in combination with each other. Learners are more likely to produce natural, fluent language when talking with a group of their peers, than when they are talking with a teacher or examiner. This can be made even easier by including conversation in the syllabus, and then testing the pupils in the groups they have been in, where they speak freely without the usual inhibitions and nervousness.

The group test can produce a more precise, less subjective and more realistic evaluation of a learner's overall language ability than most other existing tests of spoken language.

The group, of between four and eight pupils, is tested in free discussion for approximately five minutes per pupil, i.e. between 20 and 40 minutes. There should be two examiners, who take no part in the discussion. The stimulus comes from a prerecorded tape which presents a topic (specialist, if necessary) and a wide range of discussion points. The testees may take notes and are given a short warm-up period during which they can discuss possible points for discussion. The idea is that the testees are given maximum aid with ideas so that they can better show their language. The discussion is then developed by the testees and a group discussion takes place during which all testees participate. The situation must be clearly defined to the testees beforehand.

particularly if they have never participated in group conversation but as long as everyone realises it is a "group" discussion there is no problem of participation. The realisation of the need to speak in order to pass the test is normally enough stimulus to the shyer testees.

This form of test is particularly useful because it can be adjusted according to the aims of the test and the future needs of the testees. It tests all aspects of the integrated language skills and testees' linguistic performance can be judged in a naturally developed situation. From the practical point of view a number of testees can be tested at one time, the cost is minimal, very little equipment is needed, the marking (below) is quick and comparatively simple and the examiners are able to concentrate solely on the assessment of linguistic ability. The testees are under less strain, and free discussion gives them more opportunity to speak and show their ability in the spoken language. The test is at least close to a realistic situation, and certainly closer than a language laboratory test, and it can be applied to the needs of the learners. The form and content of the test is objective, the examiners having no way of influencing or altering the discussion. The assessment, too, can be relatively objective, is technically simple and demands less of the examiner than the usual interview-type test.

The marking system relies only on the examiners' knowledge of their own language, and awareness of the degrees of importance between errors. They mark, independently, on a marking sheet (app. 1), errors and plus points under four categories - Pronunciation, Lexis, Grammatical Structures, Use of Language (this means how effectively language is used for communication, whatever the number of errors, and points can be gained for use of idiom etc.). Only linguistic performance is recorded, and this is assessed in relation to the number of utterances made, also noted. An utterance should be of a reasonable length, but short, communicative utterances can be noted as half-utterances. The number of errors and plusses in each category is calculated and scaled down to an average per 10 utterances. This average is then applied to an error-points scale (app. 2) which can be formulated from previous tests and based on an average number of errors made and marks awarded. The error-points scale converts the errors and plusses to marks of 1-4 for each

category. The final mark is a combination of the two examiners' totals. The scale of Pass, Good etc. can be worked out according to the requirements of the test.

Error classification is an important element in this test. One step towards making it more objective and more realistic and valid is not to leave the assessment to personal opinion, by ensuring that it is the language alone that is being assessed and its assessment is being done according to the goals of the test. An error in spoken language can be defined as a failure of the speaker to follow the pattern or manner of speech of average people in use today in the country of the target language. Errors should be separated into Major and Minor, a Major error being one that a) causes non-comprehension of part or whole utterance, or b) causes misunderstanding of part or whole utterance, or c) because of its difference from common usage causes the listener to hesitate and therefore miss part or whole of subsequent utterances, or d) does not become redundant within a particular context (this may include brevity of utterance, abrupt change of subject or argument etc.). The relative importance of the Major error means that very few can be allowed in a test of spoken language because in all cases communication is broken and the speaker has failed in his purpose, whereas quite a number of Minor errors that within the context do not hinder communication can be allowed even for the attainment of a good mark.

Plus points are awarded under all categories, except pronunciation, for language that exceeds normal minimum requirements of communication and that adds to the effect or meaning intended in the communication (i.e. the statement could have been made in simpler terms but becomes more effective with the use of another word, structure or idiom). Plus points are also awarded under Use of Language for spoken language which lends impetus to the conversation or the speaker's own fluency.

Conclusion

The examiner at a group test is provided with an objective record of the testee's overall language ability, without having been influenced by non-linguistic factors, such as mood or appearance, and without having to rely on memory and personal judgement. It is true that the amount of language recorded is minute, but no language test that intends to test practical ability of the language can cover more than a tiny fragment of the language. The group test does, however, produce a sample of spoken

language that is representative of the testee's ability, and it is hoped that if the topic is well presented quite a wide range of discussion points can be covered. Although it is mainly errors that are noted, the emphasis within the test is on the positive side: can the testee communicate his message so that everyone else easily understands? If he can, he passes the test, no matter how many errors he makes. In fact, once a testee has made more than a certain number of errors in his speech he is no longer comprehensible, and even if he uses fine words and gains many plus points, he cannot be passed if his message is not being easily understood.

Regrettably within the scope of this paper there is no room for discussion of other forms of spoken language tests, and the group test presented here is only being offered as one possible method. The important point is that more testing should be done, particularly of the integrative language skills. A test not only shows a learner's level of ability but also exposes the strengths and weaknesses within a teaching system. If we recognise the need to teach spoken language, we should also recognise the need to test it.

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STUDENTS' NAMES NUMBER of UTTERANCES	PRON.	LEXIS	GRAM: STRUCTUR.	USE	COURSE and Year TAPE TOPIC (COMMERCE) DR DF
1 P.H. / / / / - / / 6 1/2	7 — 10 ///////		8 — 11 ////////	1 — 2 /	1 2 0 2 = 5 // + 3 // 8 FAIL
2 S.I. --//---/-//////-- 35 ///-///-//-///////-//-/---	9 — 3 //////////	++ 1 & 2+ — 0 & 2+	17 — 5/6 //// //////////////	++	4 4 2 4 = 14 // + 13 // 27 VG
3 E.R. 18 /-///-///-///-///----	2 + 13 — 2 / + 9 ////0//0//////	3 — 2 ///	5 ///////	1+3 — 1+2 0///	persuasive? 0 3 3 1 = 7 // + 6 // 13 FAIL
4 L.L. 21 1/2 //--//---//-/////////-//	1+18 — 1 /// +9 //////////0////	1 — 0 /	1+9 — 1+5 ////0/////	1 — 0 /	1 3 2 3 = 9// + 8 // 17 PASS
5 M.U. 21 //-//-/-/-////-///////	13 — 6 //////////////	4 — 2 ////	1+11 — 1+6 //////0/////	?+ + 2 — 1 00	2 3 2 3 = 10// + 11 // 21 GOOD
6 [illegible].P. ////////-//-//---/////-	2+12 — 2+6 /// //0///0////	+ 1+	12 — 6 //////////////	5 — 3 /////	transparent? 1 4 2 2 = 9// + 9 // 18 PASS?
1 = Full utterance - = part utterance	0 = MAJOR 1 = MINOR	— = in relation to 10 utterances			

MARKING SCALE for TESTS in SPOKEN ENGLISH

	Pronunciation		Lexis			Grammatical Structures		Use		
Score	Major	Minor	Major	Minor	Plus	Major	Minor	Major	Minor	Plus
4	-	2,3	-	1	-	-	2,3	-	-	+
4			§ -	-	+			§ -	-	++
4			-	2	+			-	1	++
3	1	2,3	1	-	-	1	2,3	1	-	++
3	-	4-6	1	1	+	-	4,5	-	2,3	+
3			-	2	-			-	1	-
3			-	3	+			-	-	-
3			§ -	-	-			§ -	-	+
2	1	4-6	2	-	++	1	4,5	2	-	++
2	-	7-9	1	1	-	-	6,7	1	1	-
2			1	2	+			-	2,3	-
2			1	3	++			-	4	+
2			-	3	-			-	5	++
2			-	4	+					
1	2	4-6	2	1,2	-	2	4,5	2	-	-
1	1	7-9	2	3	+	1	6,7	1	2	-
1	-	10-15	1	3	-	-	8-10	-	4	-
1			1	4	+			-	5	+
1			-	4,5	-			-	6	++
1			-	6	+					

§ where the total number of testee's utterances is lower than 10

Walter Bacon and Sirkka-Liisa Ojanen
Tampere Language Institute

FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONVERSATION TESTING AT TAMPERE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

The Language Institutes, of which there are four in Finland, were founded in 1966. Their object is to provide a professional training for translators and interpreters. Students on entry are normally qualified to the level of the school leaving examination, but have no other pre-training. Courses are normally of three years' duration, this being usually extended to four in the case of the Russian Department. All students study two foreign languages in addition to Finnish.

To graduate, a student must pass six written tests (five in the main and one in the subsidiary language), two conversation tests (one in each language), and an interpretation test in the main language. The interpretation test involves knowledge of a professional field and is carried out by two specialists and two assessors. The effectiveness of these tests is a matter of constant concern, and the latest proposals at present under consideration at Tampere are described below. As the conversation tests are probably of the most general interest, discussion is concentrated on these.

The level aimed at is that of a conversation with a non-specialised university educated person on a topic of general interest. The subjects are chosen with a view to the kind of conversation that might take place between a Finn and a foreigner, and reflect the teaching programme of the Department. In the English Department, for example, from 15 to 20 subjects are used and include education, social welfare, sport, religion, the roles of the sexes, and Finnish foreign policy amongst others.

A number of cards are prepared each listing three of these subjects. The student being tested takes a card at random, and is then allowed approximately 15 minutes in which to prepare a 3-5 minute talk on one of the three subjects. Following this the student discusses the subject with two native speakers. In addition there are

two assessors, one from outside the Institute.

Assessment on the basis of a general impression alone is uncertain and may be unduly influenced by a single factor. The scheme below aims at a balanced assessment taking into account four different factors. Points are awarded from one to five, one or less representing failure.

1. PRONUNCIATION AND FLUENCY

	Pronunciation	intonation and rhythm	fluency and clarity
5	as native	as native	very fluent and clear
4	possible errors do not disturb	interference from Finnish, but does not disturb	fluent, clear
3	errors disturb to some extent	interference disturbs somewhat	sometimes appreciable pauses, but clear
2	errors disturb continuously	disturbing interference	marked pauses, unclear
1	errors affect understanding	intonation errors affect understanding	unclear speech affects understanding almost continuously

2. COMMAND OF STRUCTURE AND VARIETY USED

	Grammatical correctness	naturalness of structure
5	nearly perfect	natural
4	small slips	some unnatural constructions, corrected by the student
3	some serious mistakes though command of basic features	some unnatural constructions
2	serious mistakes	many unnatural but comprehensible constructions
1	continuous serious mistakes	incomprehensible constructions

3. VOCABULARY, IDIOMS AND STYLE

	Vocabulary	Usage	Style
5	extensive and varied	native peculiarities in suitable proportion	choice of words and expressions suitable for subject matter
4	extensive	includes special native expressions	small faults of style
3	comparatively extensive, interference errors do not affect understanding	wrong or excessive use of idiomatic expressions	faults of style to some extent affect performance
2	restricted and interference errors affect understanding	expressions used affect understanding	confused style
1 0	very restricted, errors affect understanding		choice of words and expressions not suitable for subject matter

4. COMPREHENSION OF OTHER CONVERSATIONALISTS

5 understands natural speech without trouble

4 generally understands natural speech without trouble: questions sometimes used to clarify understanding

3 understands only if

a) speed reduced or

b) speaker repeats sections or uses simpler expressions

2 sometimes misunderstands, speaker must continuously slow down or simplify speech

1 communication impeded because of misunderstandings

0

- - - - -

Failure is caused by failure in any part of any section. "Natural" or "native" speech indicates the expressions, idioms, constructions and speed which would be used by two native speakers in conversation with each other. Assessment begins after the talk by the examinee, and only in exceptional cases may the talk be used for upgrading. The examinee may, however, be reduced one grade for undue passivity, and neither examinee nor examiners may indulge in

monologues:

An example illustrates how the final grading is calculated. A student pronounces correctly, but with poor intonation and moderate fluency. For Section 1 he might then be graded as follows:

pronunciation	intonation, rhythm	fluency	pts	av.
			15	5
(5)	5	5	14	4,5
4	4	4	13-12	4
			11	3,5
3	3	(3)	(10-9)	(3)
2	(2)	2	8	2,5
			7-6	2
0-1	0-1	0-1	5	1,5
			4-3	1

Points for each factor are added together, totalling 10. Dividing by three gives an average of 3.3, which is reckoned as 3, figures being rounded to the nearest half number below. The averages for each section are added together, and the final result determined from the table below:

Total points	grading
18-20	excellent
14-17,5	very good
10-13,5	good
6- 9,5	pass
0- 5,5	fail

The system is not difficult to operate after a little experience, but it is necessary that those working with it should have some practice before using it for a major test.

Sirkka-Liisa Ojanen: In applying this test we have experienced some difficulties - for example, the comprehension section seemed unnecessary since students were able to understand.

Walter Bacon: That hasn't been our experience in all cases. I do think, though, that examiners can affect understanding very much by the way they speak.

S-L O: Another problem is that of a very good talk and a bad discussion, or the other way round. But the table does make assessment more objective, and the assessors can split up the work if they want and concentrate on separate sections.

WB: One thing we deliberately left out of this test was assessment of the student's command of the subject. Do you think that was right?

S-L O: Yes, I do, because the student only has a limited choice. If the student has free choice - as in the entrance exam, and I think a modified version of this could be used in the entrance exam - then command of the subject should be in.

WB: Of course a number of questions that really need answering spring to mind at once. Should students be allowed dictionaries during the preparation time? What about some form of group test? What should be the relationship between the test for the main and for the subsidiary language? How far should we arrange preliminary tests for single factors? And are the different factors equally important for different languages? These questions, I think, can only be solved - if they can be solved - by research.

Philip Binham
Helsinki School of Economics

SPOKEN ENGLISH GRADING TEST[1]

The setup

For several years a separate SPOKEN ENGLISH programme has been run at Helsingin Kauppakorkeakoulu - the Helsinki School of Economics. It was initiated at the students' request and is based on:

1. "Intensive" study.
   Courses include at present 30 - 40 contact hours, and last 10 weeks. On average, students do some 80 hours.
2. Grading into levels according to ability in the spoken language.
   Results in the school matriculation exam (ylioppilastutkinto) do not provide a relevant guide.
   Students are therefore tested in the language lab on arrival, and graded into 5 levels:

   D - Very advanced
   C - Advanced
   B - Intermediate
   A - Elementary
   Z - Remedial

What do we grade for?

	Weighting
1. Ability, readiness and willigness to speak	40 %
2. Ability to handle structures	20 %
3. Ability to comprehend spoken language	20 %
4. Ability to distinguish and reproduce sounds	20 %

---

1) Lecture given at English Departments' Conference, Oulu, March 1976

Framework and administration of test

The Grading Test was evolved by a number of people over a period of time, with Ian Seaton as the guiding star. His own view of the test is:

> "The test does not fall into any 'pure' category of test. It is not an aptitude test to measure inherent disposition to succeed in learning a foreign language. It is not a test to measure for potential for profiting from different methods of teaching. It is not a 'present ability' test to measure the level of language acquired up to the time of the test. It is rather a combination of all three - or strictly the last two."

The test is administered the language lab to the new intake of 550 students, in groups of about 25 a time. Immediately after the test, 4 teacher/examiners descend upon the student tapes in the lab, and grade them. One hour is allotted to the testing and grading of each group. Results are then given to the computer, which assigns students to suitable groups at the appropriate level.

Many of the students have never been in a lab before, and may never have had to respond to a native English speaker. Thus they may be very nervous. If they "fluff" the test badly, they can (at the teacher's or their own instigation) shift to a more suitable level after teaching begins.

The test itself

A tapescript of one of the 4 alternative tests is appended (Appendix 1). The test lasts about 7 minutes, and each student's tape takes about the same time to grade. In the second item of the test, 4 slides are shown. Students are given 20 seconds to describe and comment on each of them. The slides for this test showed:

1. Busy traffic in an English city
2. A policeman talking to two children
3. An industrial scene
4. A dazzling city-by-night scene

The teacher/examiner's "Grader Key" (Appendix 2) shows the grading system.

A sample of student's Grading Test sheet (Appendix 3) is also appended. In this case the student got a good "B" level.

Results

The results of the Autumn 1976 Grading Tests can be seen in Appendix 4 in Ian Seaton's "Segment Data". The cut-off points were largely dictated by the number of groups already forecast for each level. Cut-off points:

D	84 - 100	A	31 - 55
C	74 - 83	Z	0 - 30
B	56 - 73		

Pros and cons

Pro

1. On the whole the test served its purpose in that very few students needed to be shifted to another level afterwards.
2. The test is reasonably quick and easy to administer.
3. When asked about the test afterwards, students mostly found it interesting and realistic.

Con

1. The structure section proved least satisfactory. Many students lost the pattern and consequently scored badly.
2. The test seems to have a certain lack of coherence - one conference member said it was like the inconsequent dialogue of an Ionesco play. This may be partly due to inadequate pauses for student responses in some cases. However, students need to be able to pick up inconsequential remarks and react quickly to them in real conversation.

Further development

It might be better to run the test in a cassette lab and take the cassettes away for grading. This would reduce pressure on the examiners, and give opportunity for making notes on student performance for future diagnostic use. We are now working on a Final Spoken English Examination, and are running a pilot version in the Spring of 1976.

Appendix 1

Spoken English Grading Test No. 3

This is a short test to see what your spoken English is like. Listen carefully and speak clearly when you are asked to. Are you ready? ... Good. ANSWER these remarks:

(1. Conversation)

Hello -- How're you getting on? -- D'you think it'll rain today? -- Where did you spend your summer? -- Is that a nice place? -- How big is it? -- What did you do there? -- Were you paid well? -- By the way, d'you speak Portuguese? -- Fine, shall we try something different now? --

In a moment you will see some pictures on the screen behind the teacher. When you see them, DESCRIBE them:

(2. Slides: four slides shown to the students for comments)

(3. Grammatical structures)

Now LISTEN to this example: Do not speak:

When's John arriving? - I think he's arrived.

Listen to another example:

When's Margaret leaving? - I think she's left.

Now you ANSWER each of these questions in the same way.

When's John arriving? --- When's Margaret leaving? ---
When's Peter coming? --- When are the farmers meeting? ---
When's the lecturer speaking? --- When are the cars racing? ---
When's the plane landing? ---

(4. Listening comprehension)

Now just listen to this piece of English. After you've heard it, you'll be asked some questions about it.

Here is the news from Los Angeles. The USA and Peru have recently made a mutual five-year treaty. Under it the USA will assist Peru to expand her industry. In return, Peru will supply more fish products to the USA.

Now, here are the questions:

What countries were mentioned? --- What have these countries done? ---
What will the USA do? --- What will Peru do? --- Where did the news come from? ---

(5. Pronunciation)

Now, listen to this voice and repeat what it says:

The Norwegians --- The Norwegians have huge oil resources ---
Developments --- Developments in industry are continuing ---
These are interesting thoughts ---

(6. Sound discrimination)

Now look at your paper. Listen to these 3 words:

shop	chop	shop

Word number 2 had a different sound. It is marked with a circle. Now you continue, putting a circle round the number of the word that is different:

choke	choke	joke
beaten	bitten	bitten
a long rope	a long rope	a long robe
white shoes	why choose	white shoes
wash the car	what's the car	wash the car

THAT IS THE END OF THE TEST

SPOKEN ENGLISH | GRADER KEY | GRADING TEST

Disc.Key	Points System	Components	
1 (2) 3 Ex.	Responses : 2 - Quick and Natural 1 - An Attempt	Psychological	
1 2 (3)	Slides : 5 - Very Fluent 4 - Fluent 3 - Hesitation 2 - Stilted 1 - Very Stilted	Max.20 Responses : 10 x 2 pts.	Max.20 Slides : 4 x 5 pts.
(1) 2 3			
1 2 (3)	Grammar Questions : 3 - Correct 2 - Pronoun Fault 1 - Verb Fault 0 - Verb and Pronoun Faults	Grammar Max.20 7 x 3 pts.	
1 (2) 3			
1 (2) 3	Comp. Questions : 4 - Full Correct Answer 2 - Part Correct Answer	Comprehension Max.20 5 x 4 pts.	
	Pronun. : 2 - Correct 1 - Some Faults Discrim. : 2 - Correct 0 - Incorrect	Phonetic Max.10 Pronun. : 5 x 2 pts.	Max.10 Discrim. : 5 x 2 pts.

Silence or Incomprehensibility always scores zero.
Everything on every student tape has to be listened to.

Total points

66

APPENDIX 3

SPOKEN ENGLISH GRADING TEST

STUDENT SECTION

Name Matti Meikäläinen

	1 (2) 3	
✓	1 2 (3)	
✗	1 (2) 3	
✓	1 2 (3)	
✓	1 (2) 3	
✗	(1) 2 3	

GRADER SECTION

Components

Psychological

1 2 1 2 1 1 2
1 1 1

Responses 13

3 3 4 3

Slides 13

Grammar

1 3 3 0 3 2 1

13

Comprehension

4 4 2 4 4

18

Phonetic

2 1 2 1 2

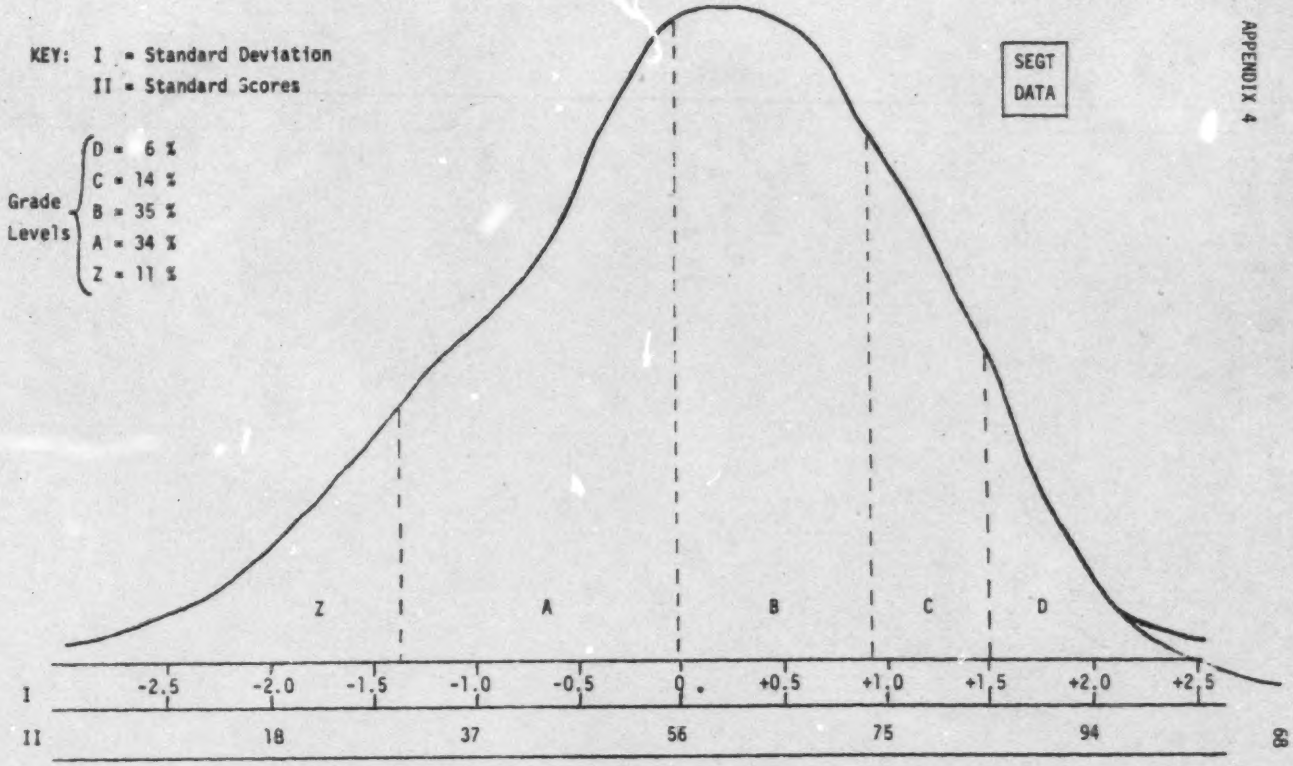
Pronun. 8

Discrim. 6

Total Points 71

67

B


KEY: I = Standard Deviation
II = Standard Scores
Grade Levels
D = 6 %
C = 14 %
B = 35 %
A = 34 %
Z = 11 %
SEGT DATA
Z
A
B
C
D
I
-2.5
-2.0
-1.5
-1.0
-0.5
0
+0.5
+1.0
+1.5
+2.0
+2.5
II
18
37
56
75
94